**4. Sociology of Religion**

Sociology of religion focuses on the influence of religion on the societal structure as no society is ever without some forms of belief in the supernatural. Specifically, this subdiscipline examines the structure of religion in a given social system and analyses the social behaviour of human beings in relation to their religious compositions. Sociology of religion emerged in order to examine the religious behaviour of individual members of society from a sociological standpoint. According to Shankar-Rao (2006), early sociological research on religion had three distinguishing methodological features and these include evolutionist, positivist and psychological characteristics. Examples of these are found in the works of sociological and anthropological scholars such as Auguste Comte, Edward Tylor, Herbert Spencer and Emile Durkheim. While some of these works are still relevant today, few of them can no longer stand the test of time or the demand of the modern day society. For example, Emile Durkheim's (1964) contribution to religion as the collective conscience is less useful in the contemporary civilised societies as religion not only unites, but also divides (Shankar-Rao, 2006; Sherkat & Ellison, 1999). Also, Marx and Engels' (1957) explanation of religion as the opium of the people does not hold in all cases. As a result, the task of sociology of religion is demanding as no social phenomenon is more resistant to scientific explanations than religion majorly because of the emotional and rational bias factors.

Due to this dynamism, Sociologists are interested in examining religious beliefs and

commitments and in the effect religion has on social life (Sherkat & Ellison, 1999).

Historically, religion has played very significant role in the development of Nigerian society.

In contemporary Nigerian society, the influence of religion on occupation, education,

politics, family, and government has been very strong. Only the future can predict the likely

greater influence religion can have on the people on earth.